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LYOTARD'S AGONISTIC PRAGMATICS: ON THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMACY IN POSTMODERNITY

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Abstract: Where can legitimacy reside in a world in which foundational meta-narratives have fallen apart? To answer this question, we reconstruct the argument that French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard develops in his classic *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). His proposal is to resume the analysis of language games in terms of a general agonistic, which reveals that the interaction between speech acts constitutes a whole range of power relations. In addition to demonstrating great critical potential, representing the main contribution of that work, Lyotard's agonistic pragmatics formulates an answer to the problem of legitimation: paralogy, understood as another logic, a logic of difference.

Keywords: Agonistics. Difference. Language games. Legitimation.

A PRAGMÁTICA AGONÍSTICA DE LYOTARD: SOBRE O PROBLEMA DA LEGITIMIDADE NA PÓS-MODERNIDADE

Resumo: Onde pode residir a legitimidade num mundo em que as meta-narrativas funcionais se esfacelaram? Para responder essa questão, reconstruímos a argumentação que filósofo francês Jean-François Lyotard desenvolve no seu clássico *A condição pós-moderna* (1979). Sua proposta consiste em retomar a análise dos jogos de linguagem nos termos de uma agonística geral, que revela que a interação entre os atos de fala constitui toda uma gama de relações de poder. Além de demonstrar grande potencial crítico, representando a principal contribuição de referida obra, a pragmática agonística de Lyotard formula uma resposta para o problema da legitimação: a paralogia, entendida como uma lógica outra, uma lógica da diferença.

Palavras-chave: Agonística. Diferença. Jogos de linguagem. Legitimação.

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Here is an *analogon* of language: not only the complexity of a great city, as Wittgenstein or Descartes thought, but that of a great city where war is waged.

— Jean-François Lyotard, *Judicieux dans le différend*, p. 236.

1. The Problem of Legitimation in Postmodernity

The Postmodern Condition (1979), by Jean-François Lyotard, is very well known as one of the books that were responsible for the introduction of the notion of postmodern in philosophy. It is also recognized for launching the discussion¹, which goes far beyond philosophy², around postmodernity. What is less known is that it does not describe a rupture with modernity, but a fracture within modernity itself. Indeed, it is a circumstantial writing, a research report about the condition of knowledge in the late 1970s. We can say that the central thesis of the book is that a generalized incredulity with regard to legitimizing discourses characterizes our times (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 7), an incredulity that concerns the very procedure of legitimation in use in modernity. At the dawn of postmodernity, the great narratives of universalism are in check. For instance, the narrative of the speculative dialectics, which made the Spirit the foundation, and that of the emancipation of the subject, which made the people the source of legitimacy, find no basis anymore. The legitimizing function no longer belongs to a single discourse. As Lyotard (1979, p. 8) writes, "it was dispersed into clouds of language elements, which are narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive etc., each carrying with itself pragmatic *sui generis* valences".

Paradoxically, the deleterious effect of the postmodern condition derives from the deployment of a critical potential, which is intrinsic to Western tradition of thought itself and, above all, from the nihilism, which is inherent to modernity. Lyotard describes a crisis: postmodern is the condition of the crisis of meta-discourses, that is, the *Grundlagenkrise*³. Thus, he formulates the problem, which is also central for us here: "where can the legitimacy reside, after the metanarratives?" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 8)

Then, our problem is that of legitimation in postmodern times. It is a problem because, as we have just said, legitimacy can no longer repose on any universal discourse. Consequently, the claim of universality that characterizes the entire project of modernity has lost its support. According to Lyotard (1988, p. 36), the modern project has neither been abandoned nor forgotten, but completed and liquidated. Indeed, there are several evidences of this, but we will highlight two here, namely, the annihilation of man at Auschwitz and the hegemony of techno-scientific capitalism.

¹ Whose list of protagonists includes, besides Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty. Cf. HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt*. In: _____. *Kleine politische Schriften*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990. HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985. RORTY, Richard. *Cosmopolitanism without emancipation: A response to Jean-François Lyotard*. In: _____. *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 211-222. RORTY, Richard. *Habermas and Lyotard on Post-Modernity*. In: _____. *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 164-176).

² Cf., for example, HELLER, Agnes. *The Postmodern Political Condition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. HARVEY, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991. JAMESON, Frederic. *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Poetics of Social Forms)*. London: Verso Books, 1992.

³ In an article strategically published in Germany, Lyotard explains that what he calls *Grundlagenkrise* is quite comparable to a crisis of reason. "These are problems that are as old as Western philosophy itself and still exist. It would be as easy as it is legitimate to show that the basic crisis begins with Parmenides and represents matter for all philosophy". (LYOTARD, 1986, p. 4).

On the one hand, Auschwitz is the founding event of postmodernity, since it is a relatively successful attempt to decapitate the sovereign of modern political discourse, that is, the people. If the regicide in French Revolution is the founding crime that institutes the democratic rule of law, making the people the universal sovereign, the populicide in Auschwitz is the crime that proves that the idea of people is not universalisable. We cannot forget that Auschwitz was done in the name of the people. By definition, the people cannot be universal. As a concept, it needs to exclude from itself something other, a foreigner, a stranger, a non-people, the dissident, the different, which is not included in the definition. The people is the object of an idea and, consequently, can only be a particular. However, each time it appears in history, it is elevated to the universal concept or the Idea of the people. The procedure of universalization has the necessity to exclude or even to eliminate something other, the difference, as follows from the very definition of the concept of people. The material annihilation of this other through war is not an absurd, but an actualization of something that is conceptually very clear.

On the other hand, the completion and liquidation of the modern project has an example in the extreme technicization of knowledge and, as result, of everyday life, under the injunctions of the development of the post-industrial capitalist society. The aim of postmodernity is no less than the total domain of the objects, as well as of the subjects. The instrument for this cognitive domination is the establishment of success, effectiveness, productivity, profitability, in short, of performativity as general criterion of legitimacy. We should note that postmodernity does not discard the problem of legitimacy, but converts it in a techno-scientific problem. Since it is widely admitted that the techno-sciences carry with them somehow the legitimate standards of rationality, the problem of legitimacy also becomes a matter of reducing inputs and increasing outputs. Nothing must escape this global totalitarian and terrorist logic.

Because of the crises of meta-discourses, legitimation by performativity has imposed itself in all realms of life, defining the postmodern culture in its contrast with modern culture. If such a diagnosis is correct, we must recognize in Lyotard a lucid analyst of postmodernity. He is not dazzled celebrating postmodernity at all. Indeed, he is a severe critic of it. Moreover, he is someone who attempts to pose in new terms the problem of legitimation. As we will see, in *The Postmodern Condition*, what plays the role of criterion of legitimacy is not performativity, but paralogy, that is, another logic, a different logic, one that understands that “the invention is always done in dissent” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 8) and which is, consequently, an agonistics. In this way, the book does not develop a defense of postmodernity against modernity, but of minor narratives with no universalist pretensions, of the heterogeneity of language practices, of pluralism and of difference, as a counter-movement against the process of postmodern delegitimation. This should be clear in what comes next.

2. Linguistic Turn and Cognitive Capitalism

The experiment proposed in *The Postmodern Condition* aims the problem of the condition of knowledge in the scenario composed by the informatization of post-industrial society and of postmodern culture. The basic hypothesis here is that this condition and, indeed, the very possibility of raising the question of the legitimacy of knowledge have changed radically in the scenario of informatization of production. The predictions contained in this text of almost forty years ago are still surprisingly up-to-date, despite the prudence recommendations of Lyotard (1979, p. 11) with

regard to futurology exercises. In general, the technological transformations that define the landscape of the contemporary world result of the recent development of sciences and techniques of language, such as symbolic logics, linguistic theories, computer sciences, cybernetics, artificial intelligence studies, and so on. The influence of language knowledge over the production of knowledge in general becomes decisive as soon as we recognize in language not merely a neutral means of transmitting information, but a constitutive element of all knowledge production. We could say that this is precisely what is at stake in the so-called linguistic turn of contemporary philosophy.

According to Lyotard (1979, p. 13), for instance, the present hegemony of computing means the imposition of a certain logics, that is, of some prescriptions of acceptability for the statements, among which its translatability in machine language. Of course, this process is not strictly or only logical. It contains determinations that are of political, economic and social orders. More specifically, it obeys the economic imperatives of the development of the capitalist system in its post-industrial phase. Knowledge becomes the key force of production and, consequently, the main target of the planetary competition for power. As soon as we can speak of an information society, we also witness the phenomenon of the commodification of knowledge, which corresponds to the establishment of a brand-new economy of knowledge (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 14-5). Divided into salable unities, knowledge becomes a commodity. From now on, it will not be produced for its value of use, but for its value of exchange. Each unity of knowledge becomes an information bit and, as such, it can circulate in the same networks where money circulates (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 17). In short, postmodernity is the era of cognitive capitalism.

In this context of informatization and of post-industrialization of society, Lyotard makes a distinction at the very heart of the notion of knowledge, taking into account the idea of an epistemological conflictuality. He understands that “scientific knowledge is not all knowledge, it has always been in excess, in competition, in conflict with another kind of knowledge, which we will call, to simplify, narrative” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 18). Traditionally, we distinguish between narrative knowledge – myths, for example – and scientific knowledge, saying that only the latter explicitly poses the problem of its own legitimacy, as well as tries to establish a procedure of legitimation. However, if we take the crisis of legitimation of knowledge as a starting point, as Lyotard does, we should throw away this distinction or, at least, search it elsewhere. If scientific knowledge is in crisis, if it can no longer legitimize itself, then all knowledge has nothing more than the condition of a narrative. Compared to other narratives, the difference of the scientific narrative consists in that it does not just want to tell what is going on, but is about mastering the world. This epistemological conflict between science and narrative knowledge, the techno-scientific mastery of the world, including narrative knowledge, highlights the singular intensification of the relation between knowledge and power in postmodernity. As Lyotard (1979, p. 20) explains: “knowledge and power are two sides of one and the same question: who decides what to know and who knows what to decide? The question of knowledge in the age of computing is more than ever the question of the government”. Both knowledge and power are based on the decisions of a scientific or legislative authority that is based, on its turn, on a certain discourse, which supposedly guarantee the legitimacy of the whole composed by knowledge and power.

As we have already suggested, the idea of language as a constitutive element of the process of knowledge production on all its levels is the basic assumption of the

linguistic turn of the philosophy of the 20th century. In many regards, this turn, which puts language at the center of philosophical discussions, stands for the Copernican revolution of contemporary thought. From this point of view, any foundational project must develop itself in language and by means of language, without any recourse to an external non-linguistic authority. In short, language functions as the very instance of legitimation. We can say that the reflection of *The Postmodern Condition* – as well as that of *The Differend* – takes place within the horizon opened by the linguistic turn⁴, but tries, at the same time, to radicalize it⁵. For example, Lyotard (1983, p. 11) shows that the transformations of the argumentation strategies and of the legitimation procedures that affects philosophy run in parallel with the transformations of the information technologies and sciences. In this way, the deployment of algorithms, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics are largely techno-scientific counterparts to the progress of phenomenological hermeneutics and of analytic philosophy in their approaches to the problem of language. The linguistic turn and the informatization of production are the two sides of a same coin.

In his radicalization of the linguistic turn, Lyotard does not formulate the question of legitimacy only in linguistic terms, but also in terms of power relations. This theoretical movement requires some methodological innovations in the analysis of language, as we will see. The bottom line for this new method is the perception that the problematic of legitimacy is, at the same time, epistemological and ethical-political. In other words, it is a problematic, which relates knowledge and practice. According to Lyotard (1979, p. 20), there is a kind of “twinning between the genre of language that is called science and that other called ethics and politics”. Thus, the legitimation of science is inseparable from the legitimation of the legislator. In either the practical-normative or the theoretical-descriptive sense, the problem of legitimacy refers to that of the authority that can make a founding decision. In other words, this problem arises in the form of the question of the conditions of validity, or yet, of the authorization of statements.

Be a civil law; it is stated: some category of citizens must perform some action. The legitimation is the process by which a legislator is empowered to enact this law as a norm. Be a scientific statement; it is subject to the rule: a statement must present this or that set of conditions to be received as scientific. Here, legitimation is the process by which a “legislator” dealing with scientific discourse is allowed to prescribe conditions (in general, knowledge conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) for a statement to be part of that discourse and can be taken into consideration by the scientific community. (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 19-20)

In linguistic terms, knowledge is a whole, the boundaries of which are not well demarcated, of various discursive genres, of different regimes of enunciation, for instance, the linguistic genre of science, that of ethics, that of politics etc. In any

⁴ Or maybe of the “pragmatic turn”, as Frank (1988, p. 29) says.

⁵ As Gualandi (1999, p. 78-9) noted very well: “Indeed, its with *The Differend* (1983) that this turn accomplishes its most achieved ‘revolution’, conferring to language an almost absolute value, purified from any reference to a non-linguistic *dehors*, to an ‘objective’ Reality and to any empirical or transcendental, individual or intersubjective Subject, which would be exterior to language”.

case, we should note the impact of the problem of legitimacy, at the base of the enunciation of truth and justice, in the foundation of knowledge and power. Indeed, the problem of the legitimation of scientific (theoretical-descriptive) statements runs in parallel with that of the legitimation of ethical-political (practical-normative) statements. Thus, we have always to do with linguistic genres. Let us say, therefore, that the notion of narrative turns possible a kind of analysis of the problem of the legitimation procedure, which is compatible with the premises of the linguistic turn. To do this, it is necessary to develop a method of analysis able to explain the characteristics and mode of operation of statements in general. In what follows, we will see how the framework provided by Lyotard's radicalization of the linguistic turn makes possible to put in new terms the problem of the legitimation of knowledge and practice, in the postmodern information society.

3. The Pragmatics of Language Games

From the point of view of the method, the major reference of *The Postmodern Condition* is Ludwig Wittgenstein's late thought. The method of analysis of language articulated by Lyotard in this book, which we can designate as an agonistic pragmatics, is the result of an original and extremely fecund approximation between the pragmatics of the second Wittgenstein and the agonistics that we can draw from Nietzsche's perspectivism and from the argumentative praxis of the sophists. Indeed, for Lyotard, it is about complementing Wittgenstein with a reflection of political impact, able to include the question of power in philosophy of language. Thus, let us first sketch some basic lines of the thought of the second Wittgenstein.

Three theses are the most important because they define Wittgenstein's pragmatics: (1) language does not possess a unitary essence; (2) we have to understand language as a disseminated multiplicity of linguistic practices, that is, as language games; and (3) the use of the words is what determine its meaning. In this way, Wittgenstein articulates these theses in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), as well as in other late writings that join the intention of profoundly revising the philosophy of language contained in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1918). We should remember that the influence of the *Tractatus* was decisive for the movement of the analytic philosophy that was born with the linguistic turn. Indeed, this work has largely become the model for the program of a philosophical-analytical foundation of scientific knowledge. In these terms, an analysis of the logical form of language, conceived as the essence of language as such, would be, on the one hand, the logical-ontological foundation of the world and, on the other hand, the logical-linguistic foundation of knowledge (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984a, § 5.6, p. 67). However, this foundationist reading of Wittgenstein is controversial, and not only because he breaks, in a latter moment, with his own thought. The *Tractatus* itself had as point of arrival the discovery of the impossibility of any rational foundation based on the analysis of the logical structure of language. We can draw nothing else from the idea that the logical form of the statement, which makes possible every representation (*Abbildung*), is not itself representable. Therefrom, the famous aphorism that closes the *Tractatus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984a, § 7, p. 85).

Is this thereof we have to remain silent the foundation in philosophical sense or the essence of language? Indeed, we can find no clear answer to these questions in the *Tractatus*. On the other hand, the *Philosophical Investigations* leave the

program of the foundation of knowledge and the plan of the description of the essence of language in a much more decided way. Now, there is no universal syntactic-semantic structure of language *a priori* determining its use. Language exists only as an irreducible plurality of practices, or yet, as a diversity of activities and functions, which are non-classifiable at the limit. These linguistic practices constitute complex networks, whose components can ensemble in a way that is analogous to the way the members of a same family share some aspects (family resemblances) (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984b, § 67, p. 278). An example here are the similarities between the tools of a same toolbox (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984b, § 11, p. 243). Wittgenstein (1984b, § 7, p. 241) proposes to call these activities “language games” and explains that they are related to concrete practices carried out within life forms. Furthermore, he clarifies that the concept of language games is not a concept in the traditional sense of the term, since we cannot precisely demarcate its limits. “We can say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with blurred edges” (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984b, § 71, p. 280). Thus, there is no definition of language games in the strict sense. Instead of the search for the essence of language and for the foundation of knowledge, Wittgenstein introduces the analysis of a plurality of heterogeneous and immeasurable linguistic practices. Let us say that, thereby, we have lost the essence, but not the essential.

However, the language games are not random activities; they follow some rules. The intersubjective use of language, that is, the social pragmatics determine these rules. Wittgenstein (1984b, § 197, p. 343) writes: “Where is the connection between the meaning of the words ‘Let’s play a game of chess’ and all the rules of the game? – Well, in the rulebook of the game, in the chess lessons, in the daily practice of playing”. In short, what defines the game is playing it. Thus, we can know nothing about the essence of language; it is not possible to unveil its foundation. Only when the game is in practice, in operation, that is, while we play the game, we can know what language is. In this way, the question is not “what is language?”, but “how does language operate?” Here, we have a pragmatic analysis of language centered on the praxis of the game and inscribed within the life forms.

Indeed, the language praxis is particularly public, shareable, or social. In this sense, Wittgenstein articulates the famous argument of the private language, according to which all language is public. Language games are based on rules that are either public or publishable. For this reason, it is not possible to communicate entirely private events, to which only the individual has access. Hence, Wittgenstein (1984b, § 248, p. 358) claims, for example, that “The phrase: ‘Sensations are private’ is similar to: ‘Solitaire you play alone’”. Solitaire is a game to be played alone, yet it is not a private game strictly speaking. Its rules, that is, what makes the game possible, are public, everyone can learn them and so play solitaire.

Moreover, the use of the words is what determines its meaning. Wittgenstein (1984b, § 43, p. 262) writes that “For a *large* class of instances of the use of the word ‘meaning’ – though not in *all* cases of its use – we can explain this word in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in language”. Indeed, the meaning of a word, that is, the significant action performed within a praxis is a coup made in a certain game and determined by its use. Words, or more broadly, statements are actions that only have meaning in a context of action, in a game, in the use of language. Assuming this position, Wittgenstein takes distances from the representational conception of the *Tractatus*. This also implies the abandonment of the idea of truth as a correspondence. Thus, on the one hand, language does not have as primary

function, nor as essence, the representation of reality. On the other hand, every representation acquires its meaning in the horizon of its use, that is, in the praxis of language. Truth is contextual in the sense that it is truth within a language game. To tell the truth is to use language according to the conventional mode, to certain rules, so that the statement can make sense inside the game where we perform it. Thus, at the initial passage of the *Philosophical Investigations*, we read: "The explanations have an end somewhere. – But what is the meaning of the word 'five'? – There was no question of such a thing here, but of how the word 'five' is used" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1984b, § 1, p. 238).

4. An Agonistic Pragmatics

Under declared influence of Wittgenstein, Lyotard understands that it is a matter of "putting emphasis on the facts of language and, in these facts, on their pragmatic aspect" (1979, p. 20-1). In this context, we should remember the distinction between the semantic, the syntactic and the pragmatic aspects that compose every language. Semantics corresponds to the study of signs or vocabulary; syntactics, of formal rules of connection or inference between signs; and pragmatics, of the use of signs and rules. Lyotard's approach does not accentuate the logical-formal, semantic and syntactic aspects of language, but its pragmatic aspect, that is, the use of language, which is seen as decisive for the definition of meaning. Thus, he considers the statement as a fact or an act, precisely a speech act. Consequently, for him, language is not a mere system of signs and their combination rules, but an activity, a practice. In other words, here we have to do with language praxis.

Simplifying a lot, we can say that the pragmatic diagram for the analysis of the phenomena of language has the form of a triangle. In the vertices of this triangle, we find the pragmatic instances of discourse: (1) the sender, the one who utters the statement (the agent that performs the speech act); (2) the recipient, the one who receives it; and (3) the referent, what the statement is about. The different ways of positioning the poles in a conversation define the types of statements. The same statement can be of various types. For instance, the statement: "The university is reopened" can be of denotative, prescriptive or performative types, according to who is its addressee: a social scientist, an ethicist or a dean. Each time, their effects are different: true or false, good or bad, well succeeded or not. Indeed, there is an unlimited and irreducible plurality of kinds of statement: denotations, prescriptions (modulated into orders, commands, instructions, requests, prayers, supplications etc.), performances, questions, promises, literary descriptions, narrations, and so on. The plurality of sign combining modes added to the plurality of modes of use of these signs generates the infinite plurality of the language. We cannot enumerate all the possible statements, nor foresee all their effects; we cannot systematize the totality of the linguistic plurality. What remains is to indicate some of the characteristics of statements, to point out similarities and differences among them and to try to understand their concrete functioning. The decisive theoretical operator for this kind of analysis is the notion of language game.

When Wittgenstein, restarting from zero the study of language, focuses his attention on the effects of discourse, he calls the various kinds of statements he finds in this way, and of which he has just

numbered some, language games. He means by this term that each of these various categories of statements must be able to be determined by rules that specify their properties and the use that can be made of them. (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 22)

We can say that Lyotard's main remarks about the language games are three. The first concerns the contract between the players, which can be explicit or not, but always legitimizes the rules of the game and, consequently, makes it work. The second observation is that, "in the absence of rules, there is no game; even a minimal modification of a rule changes the nature of the game" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 23). Therefore, the transition from a game to another starts with the articulation of a statement that does not obey the rules of this game, but to the rules of some other. The last remark concerns the use of the term *coup* to designate statement: "every statement must be considered as a 'coup' made in a game" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 23). This means that language games are games whose "coups" are statements.

These observations lead Lyotard to a point that we should emphasize here because it means his main contribution to pragmatics, namely the introduction of the question of power relations in philosophy of language through the principle of a linguistic agonistics. This corresponds to the discovery "that talking is fighting, in the sense of playing, and that acts of language are part of a general agonistic" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 23). According to Lyotard, this principle underlies the method for tackling questions of language and of the condition of knowledge in postmodernity. It constitutes the basis for the articulation of an agonistic pragmatics, which relates Wittgenstein's analysis of language games and Nietzsche's perspectivism. Generally, it is about placing speech acts under the aegis of *agon*, thinking the linguistic relations of power, and approaching each statement or phrase as a coup made in a game, in a dispute. What happens is an *agon* of phrases. In other words, the phrase-to-phrase relations are relations of power. In this sense, we can say that linguistic agonistics is a principle of difference. The Greek *agon*, especially, that which can be derived from the sophists' discursive praxis, provides the basic schema for thinking language. Without violating its heterogeneity, it allows to understand the recurrent and essentially democratic phenomenon of discursive dissent, which all totalitarianism aims to suppress.

In this way, the agonistic pragmatics does not accept that the "force without force of the best argument", as Jürgen Habermas (1971) would put, is the ultimate criterion of legitimation, since agonistics understands this force (*Zwang*) precisely as force, although it is of argumentative nature. Indeed, besides Habermas, several logicians speak about a logical force (FRANK, 1988, p. 15-8), for example, Frege with the concept of an assertive force or Searle with the notion of an illocutionary force. Lyotard binds this pure force to the Nietzsche's idea that will to truth is also will to power. This is why we need an analytics of discursive forces, that is, an agonistic pragmatics, in order to think how arguments can exert force on one another and, therefore, how discursive power relations are established. The irenism of consensus theory prevents it from understanding the relevance of the question of power for the philosophy of language. At the same time, it ends up paradoxically forcing the agreement. Denying the strategic use of discourse, the irenistic perspective does not fully understand it precisely because it deprives itself, by principle, of making the discursive power relations a research theme. Thus, for example, an ideology legitimizing the imperialist project of the universalization of democracy at any cost,

including war, that is, state terrorism, can easily absorb this perspective. Moreover, in its confrontation with agonistic pragmatics, the supposedly irenistic theory of consensus commits a totalitarian, even terrorist, slip in its very defense of democracy. The point is that the agonist does not exclude the irenist from the conversation as a matter of principle; what happens is the reverse.

5. The Agonistic Pragmatics of Society

The idea of a general agonistics is not restricted to the analysis of language. Indeed, it starts from a linguistic analysis and then moves to the social plan. For Lyotard (1979, p. 24), coups of language are the constitutive unity of the observable social bond. This confirms the premise of a linguistic agonistics. Thus, based on an analogy between linguistic interaction and social interaction, Lyotard draws an agonistic of the society, whose task consists in understanding the nature of the social bond in postmodernity. Let us see how.

According to Lyotard, the models produced in modernity to think social interaction ended up being insufficient. This is particularly the case of the idea that society forms a functional organic whole (from Comte's positivism to Luhmann's system theory, passing through Parsons's functionalism). Another example of that is the idea that society splits itself into two classes in struggle (from classical Marxism to critical theory of society). On the one hand, as a self-regulating or self-poietic system, society is a homogeneity that excludes from itself any kind of conflict, understanding it only as dysfunction or anomaly. The system ultimately absorbs any reaction or overall resistance and reinterprets them according to its own purposes. Here, we have to do with the utopia of an integrally united and pacified society, which rejects, by principle, the productive potential of conflict and, even worse, establishes a totalitarian logic that leaves no choice (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 25-6). On the other hand, the model based on the idea of a social duality is too simple. Indeed, if the idea of class struggle makes possible to understand the conflictuality inherent to all forms of society, at the same time, it restricts the totality of conflicts to a conflict between two specific classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which does not identify, by the way, most of the world's population anymore (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 27-8). Following a dialectic that does not cease to be abstract, the synthetic form of an *Aufhebung* as totalitarian as that of organicism is able to bring every conflict to resolution. For Lyotard, these two models are modern, since they resort, at the last instance, to the great narratives of legitimation, either to the speculative narrative of the self-realization of the Spirit as social system, or to that of the emancipation of the rational subject.

Let us put aside, for a moment, the problems raised by the internal dynamics of these great narratives, which will certainly produce their delegitimization. The point is that the models for understanding the social bond produced in modernity do not correspond to the fragmentation of forms of life and knowledge, nor to the radical heterogeneity of language games characteristic of postmodernity. "From this decomposition of the great narratives (...), it follows what some people analyze as the dissolution of the social bond and the passage of social communities to the state of a mass composed from individual atoms thrown into an absurd Brownian movement" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 31). As these narratives were the base for the unity of collective experience, their dissolution implies the dissolution of the consciousness of belonging to a social body, whether it is organic or divided into classes. What

remains is the individual, the self, as an atom thrown into the amorphous mass of postmodern society. However, this social atom never isolates itself. Strictly speaking, it is never a solipsist subject. Rather, we will find it within information hubs, in “nodes of communication circuits”, in a “texture of relations more complex and more mobile than ever” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 32). We will also find it in a network of language power relations, that is, of statements that obey a general agonistic. The individual “is never, even the most underprivileged, devoid of power over these messages that cross him and position him, whether as sender, recipient or referent” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 32). Therefore, we can speak of the agonistic pragmatics of socio-discursive bond.

For such an approach of society, the minimal relation is precisely the language game. This does not mean that all social relations are linguistic. However, what is first and most directly observable, what we cannot bring into question is that sentences happen, or rather, that there are language games. In this respect, Lyotard (1979, p. 32) has an argument, which is characteristically reflexive: “The question of the social bond, as a question, is a language game, that of interrogation, which immediately positions the person who poses it, the one to who receives it, and the referent it questions: this question is already the social bond”. In other words, to doubt that there are language games is already asking a question, that is, to do a coup in the language game of doubt and, consequently, to affirm, by an indirect way, what we intend to question. We cannot deny the existence of the social bond as well as we cannot deny that of the language games.

Thus, the reflection on language shows that it is not possible to doubt that there is statement and, indeed, someone who poses the question, without *eo ipso* articulating a statement. At the same time, we should remark that the articulation of any statement is, as such, a linguistic coup, carried out within a network of enunciative force relations, on which the statement attempts to produce effects. Therefore, we should include agonistics among the presuppositions of the pragmatics of social relations. About the general picture of this social pragmatics, Lyotard (1979, p. 33) writes:

The atoms are placed at the crossroads of pragmatic relations, but they are also displaced by the messages that pass through them, in a perpetual movement. Each language partner suffers, during the “coups” that concern him, a “displacement”, an alteration, of whatever kind, and this not only as a recipient and a referent, but also as a sender. These “coups” cannot fail to provoke “counter-coups”; but everyone knows from experience that the latter are not “good” if they are only reactive. Because they are then only programmed effects in the strategy of the adversary, they accomplish this one and go therefore backwards of a modification of the relation of the respective forces. Hence, the importance of aggravating and even disorienting the movement, in order to bring about a “coup” (a new statement) that is unexpected.

According to Lyotard’s agonistic pragmatic schema, language relations are relations of forces, statements are performed as coups and counter-coups, in short, they are power relations. As such, these relations have the form of fight, battle, *agon*, and surely involve destruction. Intending to validate, that is, to make true, his own

argumentation, the sender can try to destroy, to invalidate the argumentation of his interlocutor. However, only in a reactive perspective, that is, with resentment, we do not notice that the argumentation, despite its agonistic nature, also has a productive aspect. This stems precisely from fight, contest, dissent (difference). The shock of statements is what makes possible the advent of the new in the form of an unexpected coup, namely, a different statement, which is capable of subverting the rules of the game and, so to speak, of destroying it, but not without, at the same time, engender another game. As Lyotard (1979, p. 34) says:

In the ordinary use of discourse, in an interlocation between two friends, for example, the interlocutors make fire from any wood, changing of game from one statement to the other: the questioning, the prayer, the assertion, the narrative are thrown pell-mell into battle. This is not without rules, but its rule allows and encourages the greater flexibility of statements.

It is not otherwise in the pragmatics of knowledge, where agonistics allows and pushes to experimentation, to invention, to construction, favoring the occurrence of new statements and of difference. Sometimes, these gradually serve as basis for the articulation of a new whole paradigm. Indeed, experimentation, not in the sense of empirical experience aimed at verifying theoretical hypotheses, but in that of the experiment, of the invention or of the creation, is one of the productive or positive aspects of the postmodern *Zeitgeist*. Lyotard (1979, p. 33) adds that, in this sense, experimentation does not confuse itself with innovation. This is also highly esteemed in postmodernity, but follows criteria such as profitability and, in general, obeys to the injunctions of economic growth and capitalist development. On its turn, experimentation does not necessarily engage with these injunctions.

This puts into perspective the role of scholarly institutions in the exercise of the social function of knowledge control. According to Lyotard (1979, p. 34), the constraints that they establish to the acceptability of the discourses within it can block the power of discursive experimentation. This control can also assume the totalitarian form of a discursive police quite illegitimate, since it is experimentation that provides the criterion of legitimation that can oppose the dictatorship of performativity and profitability in our days, namely, paralogy. This is what we will see right now.

6. From *Grundlagenkrise* to Performativity

Postmodernity means *Grundlagenkrise*, crisis of the foundation, crisis of legitimation. It establishes itself as a process of internal erosion of the procedures of legitimation of knowledge and practices produced in modernity. From its beginning, modernity is pregnant of a movement that will lead to its own overtaking. It is born from an attitude of rejection of the past, understood as condition of the self-affirmation of a new time. However, *Neuzeit*, modernity cannot refrain from repeating the revolutionary act of destruction, which is in its origins. At some point, this turns against itself. In other words, it is an internal crisis: the loss of credibility of great narratives, especially, the speculative narrative and that of emancipation, stems from the requirement of veracity imposed by these narratives to themselves. With the introduction of the discussion around nihilism in philosophy, Nietzsche points out this

phenomenon. From where Lyotard (1979, p. 65) concludes: “Thus, comes to light the idea of perspective, which is not distant, in this respect at least, from that of language games. This is a process of delegitimation that is driven by the requirement of legitimation”. Still, this process of delegitimation means a crisis of philosophical rationality, a deep questioning of the foundational task that philosophy understood as its own from its beginning. Therefore, it is a philosophical crisis and this crisis radically poses the problem of the self-understanding of the role, which philosophy must play from now on.

From the point of view of science, there seems to be no crisis. What we see is rather the establishment of the empire of techno-sciences. Science believes in its own self-legitimation by principle. It believes it can find the criterion of its own legitimation in itself. Therefore, it announces the obsolescence of the philosophical foundation procedures. From the perspective of postmodern techno-science, the idea of a single foundation, of a single discourse, which intends to make multiplicity return to unity, seems unnecessary and even absurd. Questions of justification are supposed to be resolved by within the discourse of each science. In this sense, science does not need philosophy any more. The researches, which are oriented towards a general unification of rational methodologies, reveal to be a pretentious utopia, or simply, a vain idea.

However, the loss of function of the universal narrative that characterizes philosophy poses problems for the autonomy of science. Indeed, the rational legitimation of scientific knowledge was the criterion for the demarcation between knowledge and non-knowledge. The dissolution of great narratives forces science to recognize the existence of other forms of knowledge as legitimate as science itself. In this regard, Lyotard speaks about a postmodern pragmatics of research, which extends the status of narrative to all knowledge. Thus, on the one hand, there is the great philosophical narrative more and more reduced to the condition of historical curiosity and deprived of effective function. On the other hand, there are minor narratives that include scientific knowledge, whose legitimization is internal to sciences, as well as expressions of narrative knowledge, which can no longer be declassified as non-knowledge. The very distinction between narration and science would completely collapse, if it had not a strategic function, which goes far beyond the objective of simply narrating the history of knowledge. Of course, this strategic function aims to ensure the privileged position of the scientific narrative in the modern epistemological hierarchy. Nevertheless, the point is that this strategy cannot work anymore; it is not sustainable in the new context of postmodernity.

Besides that, performativity imposes itself in the pragmatics of postmodern science as the only criterion of legitimacy able to go beyond the methodological specificities of each science. As a technical form of legitimation, performativity corresponds to the principle of “optimizing performance: increasing output (...), reducing input (...). So, these are games whose relevance is neither the true, nor the right, nor the beautiful, etc., but the efficient: a technical ‘coup’ is good when it is better and/or when it spends less than another” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 73). It is efficiency, success, productivity as a criterion of legitimacy. This logic of the most performative is at work not only in applied research, but also in fundamental research. Lyotard (1979, p. 75) writes: “We must fund research with lost funds for a while to increase the chances of obtaining a decisive and, consequently, very profitable innovation”. The temporal determination is very important here. Research that does not produce results, which are compatible with the purposes of a capitalist

society, that is, whose outcome is not convertible into profits, lose its sources of funding and, finally, is abandoned. The situation would not be so problematic if the imperatives of the globalized market were not exclusively defining the collective aims.

In this framework of a geopolitical race for the domain of knowledge production, a crucial question highlighted by Lyotard (1979, p. 73-4) is that of the relation between postmodernity and cognitive capitalism. In this regard, he writes: “no proof, no verification, and no truth, without money. The games of scientific language will become games of the rich, where the richest is most likely to be right. An equation emerges between wealth, efficiency, truth”. The computing technologies convert knowledge into a mass of information, which can no longer stay in the mind or memory of the subjects, but is externalized and filed in databanks, which belongs to large corporations. The main implication of this is that the criterion for judging the relevance knowledge becomes its commercial value, instead of its truth. In short, knowledge is produced in order to be sold. The systematic conversion of knowledge in commodity is what constitutes the cognitive capitalism, whose subjective transformations are deep and unforeseeable.

The consequences of the advent of this new economy of knowledge are extreme for the modern institution of production of knowledge *par excellence*, namely, the university. The possibility of losing its function of public space of formation to become no more than a provider of educational services now jeopardizes it very concretely. What emerges is a kind of university-enterprise that operates exclusively based on the logics of the market. In other words, if we accept Lyotard's diagnosis on the postmodern condition, we have to say that the identity of the university has been defined, since the 1970's and very probably will continue to be defined for the next years, by its relation with the current economy of knowledge, that is, with cognitive capitalism.

7. Paralogy and Difference

On the one hand, the pragmatics of postmodern sciences keep a close relation with a cognitive capitalism, that is, with an economy of knowledge, which apprehends them as productive forces. On the other hand, the sciences go also far beyond the logic of the profitable and more performative. What distinguishes postmodern science from modern science is the search for instabilities. This takes invention as the object *par excellence* of a cognitive *pathos*, of an epistemological desire, of a will to know. We can consider the last as a counter-power, a power of resistance, which moves against the commercialization of knowledge. Lyotard (1979, p. 90-6) explains that quantum mechanics, based on the principle of indeterminacy, fractal geometry, questioning precision patterns of measurement, and chaos theory, describing discontinuities in mathematical language, are examples of this research of instability in hard sciences. For instance, according to Lyotard (1979, p. 90), the meta-mathematical research that leads Gödel to prove the impossibility of consistent arithmetic systems bears the value of a paradigm for the new scientific mind, which obviously goes beyond the limits of mathematical research. Therefore, it is the very use of the idea of system that forces change, especially, but not only, in social theory.

In this way, the analysis of scientific pragmatics in postmodernity leads to the hypothesis of a legitimation by paralogy. The prefix “para” – the same one found in “paradox” or in the “paralogisms” studied by Aristotle and by Kant – refer to “another”.

Therefore, we are dealing with another of logic, a logic of the other, with a different logic, a logic of difference, with a parallel logic, a para-logy. Lyotard (1979, p. 97) emphasizes:

Focusing on the undecidable, on the limits of precision of control, on quanta, on conflicts with incomplete information, on "*fracta*", on catastrophes, on pragmatic paradoxes, postmodern science makes the theory of its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, non-rectifiable, and paradoxical. It changes the meaning of the word know, it says how this change can take place. It produces not the known, but the unknown. It suggests a model of legitimation that is not the best performance, but that of difference understood as paralogy.

In this way, the pragmatics of postmodern sciences, the linguistic praxis in its general cognitive function, is supposed to give birth to ideas, to multiply methods, to change the rules of the game, in order to find a new statement, expression of the unknown, and of which the global consequences are unpredictable. Therefrom, we find within the scientific pragmatics the idea that invention presupposes debate, confrontation of positions, contest, in a word, it presupposes agonistics, rather than the quest for homology by consensus. The agonistic relations between sentences that characterizes the pragmatics of postmodern sciences have a subversive and creative power of invention of the new. "We must assume a power that destabilizes the capacities to explain and which manifests itself by the enactment of new standards of intelligence or, if you prefer, by the proposal of new rules for the language game" (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 99). An analysis of the scholarly discourse in general, which includes the agonistics among its presuppositions, shows that the invention of new statements and new rules of language games, as well as the discovery of new presuppositions is a constant. Lyotard (1979, p. 88-9) writes that "to work on the proof is to seek and invent the counterexample, that is, the unintelligible; to work on argumentation is to search for the paradox and legitimize it by new rules of the game of reasoning". This agonistics is able to renew and to multiply not only science, but also knowledge in general. In other words, there is a potentiation of the faculty of knowing thanks to the agonistics operating at the base of the pragmatics of research.

The point is that, as a condition for the practice of experimentation, we should learn to appreciate the constructive or productive and, in this sense, positive aspect that the power relations between the arguments also have, instead of keep mourning the lack of an argument with which everyone agree, that is, an improbable all-inclusive consensus. However, the regulative ideal of a universal consensus, which ultimately remains as a never acquired horizon, combined with the imperative of maximum performativity, risks to become a terrorist behavior. By terror, Lyotard (1979, p. 103) understands "the efficiency gained from eliminating or from threatening of elimination a partner from the language game". Therefore, terror is the exclusion of the other, of who disagrees, the dissident, or the different.

On its turn, the idea of paralogy in scientific pragmatics means that the only criterion to evaluate the acceptability of a statement is its capacity to rise new and different statements. What is at stake is to bring out conditions, presuppositions or meta-prescriptions, with which the conditioned statements may break, because they

function as simple directives or starting points, devoid of any foundational role. Let us insist on this, for the scientific pragmatics, the criterion to establish a legitimate statement is inventive, innovative, and experimental character may have, its difference, and nothing is better to produce difference than agonistics. In short, paralogy means that difference is the criterion of legitimation. Therefore, we should not understand it as a universal condition, which constraints the enunciative production. It is less a condition than a possibility. In other words, the presuppositions that an agonistic pragmatic analysis extract from the discursive praxis are attached to the language game that they make work. As such, they have a specific historicity; they are “historical *a priori*”. This is why paralogy means a non-universal, local, and contextual, an in space-time situated kind of legitimation.

The problem of legitimation implies the same with regard to social pragmatics, which “is a monster formed by the interweaving of networks of heteromorphic statement classes [...]. There is no reason to think that one can determine meta-prescriptions common to all those games” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 105). This remark contains a harsh criticism, for example, on Habermas’ consensualism. Consensualism is not in itself a terrorist attitude, but as long as it is an irenistic position, the discourse of techno-scientific performativity can easily co-opt it. Therefrom, Lyotard’s suspicion against the idea of consensus: “Consensus has become obsolete and suspect value. What is not, is justice. We must therefore come up with an idea and a practice of justice that is not linked to those of consensus” (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 106).

How can we put ourselves on the path that leads to this reformulation of justice in postmodernity? Is not it too optimistic? We can say that Lyotard offers an answer to this question, which is a principle that he conceives with strong ethical-political connotations, his principle of legitimacy, namely, the respect for difference and pluralism as a form of resistance against terror.

The recognition of the heteromorphy of language games is a first step in this direction. It obviously implies the renunciation of terror, which presupposes and tries to realize their isomorphy. The second is the principle that, if there is consensus on the rules that define each game and the “coups” that are made there, this consensus must be local, that is, obtained from the current partners, and subject to termination. We move then towards multiplicities of finite meta-arguments, we mean, arguments concerning metaprescriptives and limited in space-time. (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 107)

Nevertheless, this last quote reveals maybe more than Lyotard had foreseen in his approach to the agonistics of language. It shows that suspicion of consensus should not be so radical. Consensus is not necessarily a terrorist idea. We can apply paralogy to the idea of consensus, in order to produce another conception of consensus, a local and provisional one, which in principle is neither in contradiction with agonistics nor with the expression of difference. What is exactly the nature of this consensus? Is this some kind of assemblage, of alliance, of compromise? *The Postmodern Condition* does not provide a clear answer to these questions. Indeed, this is already another problem.

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